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## **The making of Buddhism in modern Indonesia: South and Southeast Asian networks and agencies, 1900-1959**

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### **Citation**

*The making of Buddhism in modern Indonesia: South and Southeast Asian networks and agencies, 1900-1959.* (2020, November 5). *The making of Buddhism in modern Indonesia: South and Southeast Asian networks and agencies, 1900-1959.* Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/138130>

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**Title:** The making of Buddhism in modern Indonesia: South and Southeast Asian networks and agencies, 1900-1959

**Issue Date:** 2020-11-05

## Chapter 2

# Bringing (Back) Buddhism to Indonesia: the Southern Buddhist Networks

It will not be a difficult task to convert Java. Buddhism is in the hearts of the people, at the very bottom of their souls. The Javanese soul is created by Buddhism and it will never find rest till it kneels down again at the foot of the *Tathagata*, saying: *Buddham saranam gacchami*, I go to the Buddha for refuge.<sup>1</sup>

The rise of Buddhism was a global phenomenon that was especially noted in Europe. For instance, the Berlin newspaper *Aneta Transocean* in one of the editions of *Moestika Dharma* stated that<sup>2</sup>

Newspapers from the Far East showed that there has arisen a big movement in Buddhism that is most likely to influence intellectuals and political notions in the whole of Asia. Politics in China, political unrest on the Asian continent, along with the emergence of nationalism in colonial religions, have caused a tumultuous situation of which European countries should be aware.<sup>3</sup>

In the early twentieth century, the political changes in mainland China

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1 W.J. van Dienst, "Present religious condition in Java", *The Buddhist*, vol.7 no.7 (November 1936), 389.

2 "Aneta Transocean," *Moestika Dharma: Maandblad tentang Agama, Kabatinan dan Filosofie* 19 (October 1933), 684.

3 *Ibid.*, 684.

triggered the revival of religions, including Confucianism. Consequently, this religion became popular in Southeast Asian regions such as British Malaya and colonial Indonesia. Buddhism was also revived at this time. As part of this revival, some Mahayana Buddhist monks from China were sent to Sri Lanka (what was known as Ceylon) to study Buddhism there and then to establish a centre of Buddhist learning upon their return to China.

In Southeast Asia, various organizations were set up to promote Buddhism. For example, in Chiang Mai, Thailand (what was known as Siam), the Universal Union of Diffusion of Buddhist Philosophy was set up in 1913. In Thaton, Burma, similar organizations were also founded, such as the Young Men's Buddhist Association, which was established in 1906. In British Malaya, particularly in what is known as Singapore today, a couple of Buddhist organizations were also founded. An example was the International Buddhist Union that was established in 1929 and the Singapore Buddhist Association which was established between 1922-1923.

This chapter focuses on the networks affiliated with Southern Buddhism or what is also known as Theravada Buddhism. These Southern Buddhist networks consisted of two international organizations, namely the Theosophical Society and the Java Buddhist Association (JBA), which were founded by Europeans and Asian Buddhists. These organizations played a major role in the introduction of Buddhism in early twentieth century Indonesia.

The Theosophical Society is an international organization with numerous branches in South and Southeast Asia where it influenced the development of Buddhism. In some regions, such as Sri Lanka, the Theosophical Society was a significant support movement to modern Buddhist revivalism. The Theosophical Society also provided connections to help people communicate with each other regarding their concerns about Buddhism. This is particularly seen in Southeast Asia. Thus, the connections established by the Theosophical Society with Buddhists in the Indonesian archipelago will be discussed in this section.

It is particularly important to dissect the web of networks of the Buddhist organizations and its role in bridging individuals and organizations in order to historicize the diverse actors' involvement in the (re)introduction of Buddhism. Internationalism in this Buddhist institutional context is thus understood as not being antagonistic to nationalism. Rather, such a stance is aligned with the perspective taken by Glenda Sluga, a professor in international

studies, who sees internationalism and nationalism linked as liberal ideologies.<sup>4</sup> Both elements reinforce rather than work against each other.<sup>5</sup> According to scholars in social studies Jeronimo and Monteiro, religious internationalism in the post-World War I era intersected with imperialism and the colonial project and outlook. Two examples are the Protestant International Missionary Council and the Catholic mission.<sup>6</sup> Such missionary organizations were able to operate in Indonesia with the support of the colonial government which regarded Protestant and Catholic missionary activities as helpful to the successful implementation of government policies.

In 1901 the Dutch colonial government launched a new policy called the “Ethical Policy.” Consequently, a new era of environmental changes began.<sup>7</sup> However, although this policy was intended to benefit the entire Dutch colonial territory in Indonesia, its implementation tended to favour Christians. In the work of Indonesian Islamic scholar, Muhamad Ali, he cites Queen Wilhelmina’s words as written by Kroef thusly: “as a predominantly Protestant nation, the Netherlands has a duty to improve the condition of native Christians in the Indonesian archipelago, to give Christian missionary activity more aid and to inform the entire administration that the Netherlands have a moral obligation to fulfil as regards the population of those regions.”<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, the Christian missionaries were responsible for modernizing and educating the local people in colonial Indonesia.

However, in this chapter it is argued that the institutional progress that took place after the implementation of the Ethical Policy also occurred in other

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4 G. Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2013), 3.

5 D. Laqua. “Internationalism and Nationalism in the League of Nations’ Work for Intellectual Cooperation,” In M.B. Jeronimo and J.P. Monteiro (eds), *Internationalism, Imperialism and the Formation of the Contemporary World: The Past of the Present* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 61.

6 M.B. Jeronimo and H.G. Dores, “Internationalisms and the Politics and Policies of Mission in the Portuguese Colonial Empire (1885-1930),” *Illes Imperis* 19 (2017), 107.

7 Ricklefs notes that although the Ethical Policy promised much but delivered little real environment change, the policy is still central to explaining changes of colonial environmental policy and Indonesian history in the early twentieth century. See M.C. Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia Since c. 1200* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 183.

8 M. Ali, *Islam and Colonialism: Becoming Modern Indonesia and Malaya* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 76.

communities. In particular, it promoted the growth of transnational networks connecting Buddhist organizations. This chapter thus focuses on a period that Takashi Siraishi, a Japanese historian, calls “an age in motion.” Siraishi points out that although the organizations described in this dissertation were not as politically aggressive, the concept of “motion” captures the awareness of a new idea in response to the dynamics of that period.<sup>9</sup> Like nationalistic organizations that raised political awareness and new ideas among the native populations of South and Southeast Asia, the transnational networks linking Buddhist organizations resulted in a new awareness and ideas about being a Buddhist in the modern world. Thus, the transnational networks between Buddhist institutions were pivotal to the (re)introduction of Buddhism in colonial Indonesia and, consequently, became the hallmark of Buddhist (re) emergence.

Aside from the Theosophical Society, another international organization discussed in this chapter is the Java Buddhist Association (JBA), an organization headed by Europeans Ernest Erle Power (henceforth E.E. Power) and Willem Josias van Dienst. The organization is important because of its role during the course of the introduction of Southern Buddhist tradition, particularly in Batavia. Specifically, the organization challenged misleading practices in the temple and advocated for changes.

In addition to the Theosophical Society and the JBA, Bhikkhu Narada, a Southern Buddhist monk from colonial Sri Lanka, also played a significant role in the introduction of Buddhism in Indonesia. Representing the Asian Buddhist intellectual in this process, his participation extended beyond the end of the colonial empire, hence the discussion on Bhikkhu Narada, which begins in this chapter, continues in Chapter Six.

## 2.1. THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

The Theosophical Society was founded in New York on 17 November 1875 by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891), a Russian-born woman, and Henry Steel Olcott (1832-1907),<sup>10</sup> who became the first president of the

9 T. Siraishi, *Zaman Bergerak: Radikalisme Rakyat di Jawa 1912-1926* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1990), xi.

10 I.P. Nugraha, *Teosofi, Nationalism and Elite Modern Indonesia* (Beji, Depok: Komunitas Bamboo, 2011), 6.

Theosophical Society. The word “theosophy” is derived from the Greek words, *Theos* meaning God and *Sophia* meaning Wisdom. Hence, it is understood as Godly Wisdom or Divine Wisdom, which means obtaining wisdom directly from God.<sup>11</sup> The organization was established to counter materialism and atheism, particularly in America and Europe, where the founders believed these perspectives were rising. The members of the society were encouraged to develop freedom of thought and work towards the betterment of society through spiritual ways.

Instead of supporting only one major religion, the Theosophical Society promoted syncretic beliefs. This is reflected in the Society’s three major aims: “first, to form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour; second, to encourage the study of comparative religion, philosophy and science; third, to investigate the unexplained laws of Nature and the powers latent in man.”<sup>12</sup> Thus, the members of the Society consisted of people from different faiths, based on the Society’s motto, “There is no Religion higher than Truth.”<sup>13</sup> The three major aims of the Theosophical Society are an important premise for understanding the different movements in which the society was involved.

Studies of the Theosophical Society cover two major chronological periods. The first covers the period from 1875-1878, when the Society was built on the foundation of Spiritualism. The second period covers the time when the Society underwent an “oriental shift” after it relocated to Adyar, a neighborhood in Madras, nowadays known as Chennai, India in 1879.<sup>14</sup> After this move, the philosophy of the Theosophical Society became heavily influenced by Eastern texts and mythology. Lavoie writes that after its arrival on Indian soil in 1879, the society connected with Arya Samaj, a Vedic group, and established a relationship with it.<sup>15</sup> However, this relationship lasted very briefly because of a dispute over a bill incurred for welcome festivities for Blavatsky and Olcott when they arrived in Bombay. Lavoie further claims that the eclectic attitude of the Theosophical Society was another reason

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11 A. Besant, *Theosophy*. (New York: Dodge Publishing Co, 1912), 9.

12 *Ibid.*, 89.

13 *Ibid.*, 90.

14 J.D. Lavoie, *The Theosophical Society: The History of Spiritualist Movement* (Boca Raton, Florida: Brown Walker Press, 2012), 4.

15 *Ibid.*, 31.

why it severed its ties with Arya Samaj,<sup>16</sup> whose nature was theologically exclusivist in contrast to the eclectic nature of Theosophy. Nevertheless, the brief relationship between these two movements indicates that when the Theosophical Society arrived in India, other movements were already established there. In other words, the Theosophical Society was one of many reform movements in nineteenth century India, among which were Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj, Ram Krishna Math and the Mission.<sup>17</sup>

After the Theosophical Society ended its relationship with Arya Samaj, it began working with other Buddhist organizations. The relationship with Buddhism began when Blavatsky and Olcott travelled to colonial Sri Lanka. Eventually, both of them converted to Buddhism in 1880. The Sri Lankan visit was followed by other visits with Olcott heading the Theosophical Society. The close relationship between Buddhism and the Society that developed from these visits led to the Society not only establishing itself in Sri Lanka but also in other regions, notably Adyar, India which eventually became the Society's headquarters.

The spread of the Theosophical Society to other regions is briefly reviewed below. After the passing of Blavatsky and Olcott, the leadership of the Theosophical Society was assumed by Annie Wood Besant in 1907.<sup>18</sup> It was under Besant's leadership that the Society became increasingly concerned with wider issues. In their books on the Theosophical Society, authors Iskandar Nugraha, an Indonesian scholar, and De Tollenaere, a Dutch scholar, state that during Besant's leadership, the Theosophical Society became involved with issues regarding religion, education, society and politics as well as spirituality. Besant emphasized the three aforementioned Society goals to draw the attention of people around the world.<sup>19</sup> The Theosophical Society

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16 Ibid., 32.

17 P-O. Fjällsby, *Idealizing India: A Transformative Perspective on Theosophists Contribution to Education and Politics (1879-1930)* (Karlstad: Karlstads Universitet, 2016), 27.

18 Annie Wood Besant was the second president of the Society (1907-1933) with a Victorian English background. Her career in the society began in 1889 where she became a devoted pupil of the Blavatsky and Olcott. From that point, she devoted her life to the society. Aside from her books, she is known for her concern for education and philanthropic work. <http://www.ts-adyar.org/content/annie-besant-1847-1933>; A. Besant and C.H. MacKay, *Autobiographical Sketches* (Peterborough and Buffalo, NY: Broadview Press, 2009), 18.

19 Nugraha, *Teosofi, Nationalism*, 6.



reached its peak between 1907 and 1933 during Besant tenure as its worldwide president.<sup>20</sup>

Several authors have studied the Theosophical Society's involvement with issues other than spiritualism. In India, Fjällsby researched the influence of the Society on education.<sup>21</sup> As reckoned by him, the Theosophical Society in its headquarters in Adyar, Chennai was associated with its involvement with the neo-Hinduism movement on the defence of Hinduism and its ritual practices. Politically, the Theosophists were involved in establishing the Indian National Congress (INC) in 1885. Furthermore, Besant served as the leader of the Home Rule Movement, an organization she established to be a catalyst for Indian freedom from British rule. In her book, *How India Wrought for Freedom: The Story of the National Congress Told from Official Records*, Besant hoped, "May this book help Britain to understand the shame of her autocratic rule in India, her broken pledges, her selfishness, her preference of her own to India's interest."<sup>22</sup> Through Besant's involvement, the Theosophical Society became significantly involved in Indian Nationalism through expanding the movement.<sup>23</sup>

Fjällsby argues that the Theosophists also played a crucial role in Indian education. He explains how the Theosophists worked within India's education system with the aim of serving education throughout the nation.<sup>24</sup> An example is the establishment of the Central Hindu College in Benares (1898) in collaboration with the Society and Bhagawan Das, who was a nationalist and a Theosophist.<sup>25</sup>

Aside from its headquarters in Adyar, Chennai, the Theosophical Society also took root in different places and in different forms. Examples of organizations formed under the Society were The Star in The East (Bintang

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20 Besant and MacKay, *Autobiographical Sketches*, 19.

21 Fjällsby, *Idealizing India*, 163.

22 A. Besant, *How India Wrought for Freedom: The Story of The National Congress Told From Official Records* (Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House, 1915), no page.

23 S. Kaur, "Role of Women in India's Struggle for Freedom," *International Journal of Management and Social Sciences Research (IJMSSR)* 2, no. 4 (2013), 113; H. Owen, *The Indian Nationalist Movement, 1912-1922* (New Delhi: Sterling Publisher, 1990), 92-99.

24 Fjällsby, *Idealizing India*, 34.

25 *Ibid.*, 34.

Timoer), Freemasonry, Moeslim Bond, Theosophische Wereld Universiteit and The Liberal Catholic Church. According to Nugraha, these organizations were promoted by different Theosophical Society branches in different parts of the world, including Indonesia.<sup>26</sup>

### 2.1.1. The Theosophists and Buddhism

Interest in Buddhism and other Eastern religions, such as Hinduism, emerged among Western writers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This is evidenced by the emergence of works by Western authors that showed admiration for the Indian cultural heritage. One example is *The Sacred Books of the East* which is a 50 volume series of English translations of the so-called sacred texts from Asia. The series was edited by various oriental scholars included F. Max Müller. The series described elements of eastern religions, including a number of Buddhist texts.<sup>27</sup> Fjällsby asserts that Ahlback's argument that Indian ideas, such as reincarnation and karma, increasingly became popular when the Theosophical Society moved to India.<sup>28</sup> Aligned with Ahlback's argument, Fjällsby also argues that the Theosophical Society was a product of the age of intellectual discovery and that the discovery of the Indian worldview introduced new ideas outside Western Judeo-Christian to philosophers, writers, and artists and cultural groups during that century.<sup>29</sup> An interesting letter written by F. Max Müller in 1895 to his friend, Malabari, indicates that Western interest in India was much more inclined toward Buddhism. The letter shows Müller's dissatisfaction with this interest and reflects the situation at the time. In his letter Müller wrote, "I wish I would rouse more interest and more sympathy for India in England; unfortunately, the only thing that large public admires in India is the folly of Esoteric Buddhism and Theosophy, falsely so called. What a pity it is that such absurdities, nay, such frauds, should be tolerated."<sup>30</sup> Another Western

26 Nugraha, *Teosofi, Nationalism*, 46.

27 P. Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 422.

28 Fjällsby, *Idealizing India*, 38.

29 Ibid., 39.

30 F.M. Müller, *The Life And Letters Of The Right Honourable Friedrich Max Müller* (New York: AMS Press, 1976), 327-328; In contrary to the statement made by Müller, Wickremeratne claims, "In the Imperial connection with Asia

notable scholar who paid great interest to Buddhism was Thomas William Rhys Davids (1843-1922). He was known as the first Western scholar and orientalist to translate the Buddhist Pali Canon into English. By doing so, he made the scriptures available to a wider audience.<sup>31</sup>

One of the most influential and well-known works about Buddhism was *The Light of Asia: The Great Renunciation* (1879) -- a book-length poem about the life of the Buddha and Buddhist doctrine published by an Englishman named Sir Edwin Arnold, who at the time was an editor of the *Daily Telegraph*. The poetical book was based on the *Buddhacarita*, the life of the Buddha, written by Ashvaghosha, a poet from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE.<sup>32</sup> The book became one of the most important references on Buddhism for Westerners as well as some Asians.<sup>33</sup> In Indonesia, the book was translated into the Malay language and published in *Moestika Dharma*, a weekly Peranakan Chinese Buddhist magazine. Another popular book about Buddhism was Herman Hesse's *Siddhartha* (1922).

Theosophy can be viewed as a bridge between the East and West, which can be seen in many of the Theosophists' works that explicated connections between Theosophical and Buddhist ideas. Several aspects of Buddhism can be found in descriptions of Theosophical doctrines. For instance, a set of terms, images and impressions of Buddhism can be found in many of Blavatsky's publications. Her first works, *Isis Unveiled* (1877) and *The Secret Doctrine* (1888), were filled with theological concepts from Eastern religions, particularly Hinduism and Buddhism.

Unlike Müller who was interested in the Vedas, Sir Edwin Arnold was an advocate for Buddhism. Arnold worked with Anagarika Dhammapala, a Sri Lankan Buddhist revivalist, in forming the Mahabodhi Society in India. He was also a close associate of Bhikkhu Sumangala, a Sri Lankan Buddhist revivalist who was a monk.<sup>34</sup> A notable European Theosophist was Caroline

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it was Hinduism, rather than Buddhism, which held sway as the undisputed *prima donna* of the stage." L.A. Wickremeratne, *The Genesis of an Orientalist: Thomas William Rhys Davids in Sri Lanka* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1984), ix.

31 Wickremeratne, *The Genesis of an Orientalist*, xv.

32 The book was then translated into the Malay language by Kwee Tek Hoay.

33 Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism*, 420.

34 D. Geary, *The Rebirth of Bodhi Gaya: Buddhism and the Making of World Heritage Site* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2017), 28.

Augusta Foley Rhys Davids (1857-1942). She was the wife of Thomas William Rhys Davids who founded the Pali Text Society (PTS) in 1881 in England and who was a strong critic of Theosophy.<sup>35</sup> A notable writer in her own right, Caroline Rhys Davids wrote, translated and edited a number of works on Buddhism. Another widely known writer on Buddhism was the aforementioned Henry Steel Olcott. He dedicated much of his time to Buddhism, particularly in Sri Lanka. While he was there, he produced the *Buddhist Catechism* (1881) and several other works, such as *The Fourteen Fundamental Beliefs* (1891) and *The Life of Buddha and Its Lessons* (1912). (These works will be discussed in more detail in a later section.)

The Theosophical Society has had very lasting effects, not only on the reception of Buddhism in the West and on the Buddhist society in Asia. This influence was due to the Society's transnational movement which dealt with various issues and interests that addressed progressive industrialization and the impact of colonialism and foreign missionary activities. The movement in Asia addressed the political upheavals of colonialism and missionization quite distinctively. It served as a conduit for the members of the Society and enabled them to connect with individuals who shared similar interests.

The Theosophical Society gave confidence to the local people in defending their national stance against colonialism and missionization. Stephen Prothero, an American scholar of religion, believes that the Theosophical Society was not established to propagate Eastern wisdom but to provide a moral and philosophical "uplift" of spiritualism.<sup>36</sup> Evidence of this is the close relationship established with Arya Samaj soon after the Society's headquarters moved to India.

The two leaders of the Theosophical Society provided complementary skills to the organization -- Blavatsky's advanced esoteric philosophy and Olcott's organizational skills. In 1877, Blavatsky published her magnum opus titled *Isis Unveiled*, a book that discusses modern Western knowledge and ancient Oriental sources. In it Blavatsky states that all religions come

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35 T.W. Rhys Davids was more known as a famous orientalist who claimed to be the first European scholar that devoted himself exclusively to the study of Pali and Buddhism. He was a close contemporary and associate of Max Müller who worked on Hinduism and Sanskrit. See L.A. Wickremeratne, *The Genesis of an Orientalist*, ix.

36 S.R. Prothero, *The White Buddhist: The Asian Odyssey of Henry Steel Olcott* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 51.

from “one primitive source,” teach “one eternal truth” and tend toward one common goal.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, she claims that the *ursprung* (origin) of the universal religion is located in the Far East and that Buddhism and pre-Vedic Brahmanism are the sources of all religions.<sup>38</sup> It was the publication of *Isis Unveiled* which marked the beginning of the shift of the Theosophical Society’s direction from the West to the East, the birthplace of Hinduism and Buddhism.

Theosophy favoured Hinduism and Buddhism over other religions, particularly Christianity. This was evident in the inability of Olcott and Blavatsky to tolerate the work of Christian missionaries. In a correspondence to a Hindu from Calcutta, Olcott confirms that the Theosophical Society was established to promote the study of Eastern esoteric religious philosophies and expose the moral bankruptcy of Christianity.<sup>39</sup> This negativity towards Christianity originated from two reasons. The first reason was the historical context which influenced Olcott. This context was the period known as “modern unbelief,” during which Christianity became popular while other beliefs, such as atheism, agnosticism and other religions that opposed traditional Christianity were questioned. The second reason was Olcott’s awareness that the Eastern religions were in conflict with Christianity.<sup>40</sup> In this conflict, Theosophy sided with Hinduism and Buddhism against Christian missionaries who were seen as being aggressive when Blavatsky and Olcott converted to Buddhism during their visit to colonial Sri Lanka. Henceforth, they offered their full support for Buddhists in Sri Lanka in turning back Christianity missionaries.

Prothero considers Olcott an example of a culture broker<sup>41</sup> between the Occident and the Orient. In other words, Olcott facilitated the commerce of religious ideas and practices between Asia and the West because he helped to bring a whole new spiritual creation into the world’s religious marketplace.<sup>42</sup> Prothero explains further that when Olcott, whose religious background was

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37 Ibid., 58.

38 H.P. Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled: A Master-Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1979), 2639.

39 Prothero, *The White Buddhist*, 64.

40 Ibid., 65.

41 Ibid., 2.

42 Ibid., 3.

Christian Protestantism, moved from America to the colonial Sri Lanka he did not leave his American and Protestant baggage behind; in fact, he carried it along with him.<sup>43</sup> His background influenced his later spiritual life when he lived in Asia. For instance, he “creolized” American Protestant and Asian Buddhist norms.<sup>44</sup>

To summarize this section, the Theosophical Society was not only a bridge between the West and the East in terms of philosophy and new knowledge, it also supported the spread of Buddhism in different regions of South and Southeast Asia, particularly in colonial Indonesia.

### **2.1.2. The Theosophical Society in South and Southeast Asia**

It has been claimed that the Theosophical Society was one of the fundamental components for the introduction of Buddhism to Western audiences in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This section will focus on the places where the Theosophical Society established itself and how it operated such that it made influential contribution to Buddhism in Sri Lanka, Burma, the Straits Settlements (Singapore and parts of Malaysia) and Indonesia.

Understanding the role of the Theosophical Society in the development of Buddhism in Sri Lanka in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries provides insights into the emergence of Buddhism in other Southeast Asian regions. Evidence of communities observing religious holy days like Vesak is an important indication of the presence of Buddhism.

The use of similar symbols, on the other hand, can be an indication of a connection between communities in different regions. The following section will provide evidence that ceremonies for observing Buddhist holy days and the use of Buddhist symbols in Indonesia reflected the Theosophical Society’s ideas about performing these ceremonies and using Buddhist symbols, which the society first introduced in Sri Lanka and Burma.

The work of the Theosophical Society had a greater effect on Buddhism in Sri Lanka than Buddhism in any South or Southeast Asian region. The main purpose Olcott<sup>45</sup> and Blavatsky’s visit to Sri Lanka was to lend the

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43 Ibid., 4.

44 Ibid., 5.

45 Olcott was reported to have made himself a Buddhist in Galle which is thus the starting point for him in Buddhist world. See: B.P. Kirthisinghe and M.P.

strength of the West to the struggle of Buddhists in the region, which at that time faced a massive flow of Christian missionaries.<sup>46</sup>

Shortly after embracing Buddhism in 1880, Olcott analyzed the Buddhist's situation in Sri Lanka. Upon his arrival in Sri Lanka in 1884, Olcott organized the Buddhist Defence Committee that elected him an honorary member and charged him to travel to London as its representative. This was his first role acting as an intermediary between the East and West. Furthermore, in his book *George Bond*, a scholar in Buddhist studies and south Asian religions, highlights the significant role of Olcott in strengthening the role of the laity and shaping their reformist viewpoint. To support his goal, Olcott then formed the Buddhist Theosophical Society with two divisions -- a clerical division and a lay division.<sup>47</sup> The creation of a lay division gave laymen a new sense of unity in opposition to the Christians as well as independence from the monks that allowed lay people to participate in the reform of Buddhism.<sup>48</sup>

The Buddhist Theosophical Society, under the leadership of Olcott, later produced a large number of polemical works promoting the revival of Buddhism, namely two kinds of publications, such as the *Sarasvati Sandarasa* and *The Buddhist*. Other works by him focused on reforming Buddhist education which led to the introduction of the Buddhist Sunday School, which had the same standards as a Christian Sunday school, but with a curriculum based on Buddhist beliefs and traditions.<sup>49</sup>

In 1880 Olcott raised a number of issues regarding Buddhism to the British colonial government. As a representative of the Buddhist community, Olcott proposed to the British government that Vesak be considered a public holiday. This proposal was approved by the colonial government on 27 March 1885.<sup>50</sup>

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Amarasuriya, *Colonel Olcott: His Service to Buddhism* (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1981), 3.

46 G.D. Bond, *The Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka: Religious Tradition, Reinterpretation and Response* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, 1988), 47.

47 K. Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society: 1750-1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 246.

48 *Ibid.*, 247.

49 Bond, *The Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka*, 49.

50 C.V. Agarwal, *The Buddhist and Theosophical Movement: 1873-2001*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.

Another notable work by Olcott to resuscitate Buddhism included the composition of the *Buddhist Catechism*, which was published in 1881. This work specifically aimed to rival Christian catechisms by providing a succinct and comprehensive overview of Buddhist history, ethics and philosophy for beginners that would enable them to understand and follow the *Dhamma* (the teaching of the Buddha) accordingly. The content of the Buddhist Catechism was divided into five topics: (1) the life of the Buddha; (2) the Dhamma or doctrine; (3) the *Sangha* or the monastic order; (4) the rise and spread of Buddhism; and (5) several reconciliations of Buddhism with science.<sup>51</sup>

Olcott aimed not only to awake Buddhism in Sri Lanka but also to unite the Buddhist world. He headed a committee that designed a flag which would symbolize the unity between all Buddhists regardless of region or sect. The flag was raised publicly for the first time on Vesak day of 1886.<sup>52</sup>

The vision of a united Buddhist world led Olcott to concentrate on developing Buddhism throughout Asia. He set up a transnational Buddhist coalition that Prothero describes as similar to the contemporaneous Evangelical Alliance of American Protestantism.<sup>53</sup> The alliance had two goals: (1) to arrive at a common doctrinal statement on which all Buddhists could agree and (2) to launch from this common platform a united mission to reform along Buddhist lines both Occident and Orient. These goals led to *The Fourteen Fundamental Principles of Buddhism* published in 1891. It promulgated fourteen fundamental propositions purposely designed to be held in common by all Buddhists regardless of which sects they belonged to:

1. Buddhists are taught to show the same tolerance, forbearance and brotherly love to all men, without distinction, and an unswerving kindness towards the members of the animal kingdom.
2. The universe was evolved, not created; and it functions according to law, not according to the caprice of any god.
3. The truths upon which Buddhism is founded are natural. They

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(Sarnath: Maha Bodhi Society of India, 2001), 41.

51 H.S. Olcott, *Buddhist Catechism*, 36<sup>th</sup> ed. (Colombo, Sri Lanka: Ministry of Cultural Affairs, 1903), xi.

52 Olcott designed the flag and modified it in consultation with a committee comprising the following: Ven. H. Sri Sumanggala, Ven. Migettuwatte Gunnanada Maha Nayaka Thero, H.S. Olcott, D. Dharmapala and C. Pujjita Gunawardena. Agarwal, *The Buddhist and Theosophical Movement*, 43.

53 Prothero, *The White Buddhist*, 127.



have, we believe, been taught in successive *kalpa* or world periods, by certain illuminated beings called Buddhas, the name Buddha meaning “Enlightened.”

4. The fourth teacher in the present kalpa was Sakyamuni or Gautama Buddha, who was born in a royal family in India about 2,500 years ago. He was a historical personage and his name was Siddhartha Gautama.
5. Sakyamuni taught that ignorance produces desire. Unsatisfied desire is the cause of rebirth, and rebirth the cause of sorrow. To get rid of sorrow, therefore, it is necessary to escape rebirth; it is necessary to extinguish desire; and to extinguish desire, it is necessary to destroy ignorance.
6. Ignorance fosters the belief that rebirth is a necessary thing. When ignorance is destroyed the worthlessness of every such rebirth, considered as an end in itself, is perceived, as well as the paramount need of adopting a course of life by which the necessity for such repeated rebirth, can be abolished. Ignorance also begets the illusive and illogical idea that there is only one existence for man, and the other illusion that this one life is followed by a state of unchangeable pleasure or torment.
7. The dispersion of all this ignorance can be attained by the persevering practice of an all-embracing altruism in conduct, development of intelligence, wisdom in thought, and destruction of desire for the lower personal pleasures.
8. The desire to live being the cause of rebirth, when that is extinguished rebirth ceases and the perfected individual attains by meditation that highest state of peace called *Nirvana*.
9. Sakyamuni taught that ignorance can be dispelled and sorrow removed by the knowledge of the Four Noble Truths, that is:
  - Existence is misery.
  - The cause of productive misery is the desire ever renewed of satisfying oneself, without being able ever to secure that end.
  - The destruction of that desire, or the estranging of oneself from it.
  - The means of obtaining this destruction of desire. The means which he pointed out are called the Noble Eightfold Path, that is right action, right means of livelihood, right exertion, right remembrance and right meditation.
10. Right meditation leads to spiritual enlightenment, or the development of that Buddha-like faculty which is latent in every man.
11. The essence of Buddhism, as summed up by the *Tathagata* (Buddha)

himself, consists of: desisting from all evil; acquiring virtue, purifying the heart;

12. The universe is subject to a natural causation known as *karma*. The merits and demerits of a being in his past existence determine his condition in the present one. Each man, therefore, has prepared the causes of the effect which he now experiences.
13. The obstacles to the attainment of good karma may be removed by the observance of the following precepts, which are embraced in the moral code of Buddhism:
  - Kill not.
  - Steal not.
  - Indulge not in forbidden sexual pleasure.
  - Lie not.
  - Take not intoxicating or stupefying drugs or liquor.

Five other precepts which need not be enumerated here should be observed by those who would attain more quickly than the average layman the release from misery and rebirth.

14. Buddhism discourages superstitious credulity. Gautama Buddha taught it to be the duty of a parent to have his child educated in science and literature. He also taught that no one should believe what is spoken by any sage, written in any book or affirmed by tradition, unless it accords with reason.<sup>54</sup>

Olcott introduced *The Fourteen Fundamental Principles of Buddhism* during his tour of Asian countries. He intended to bring the followers of Mahayana Buddhism in Japan, Korea, China and Vietnam closer to the followers of Theravada Buddhism in countries like India, Burma, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Laos and Thailand.<sup>55</sup> The fourteen principles received respect from both schools of Buddhism, which resulted in the Mahayana and Theravada Buddhist schools agreeing to the concepts stated.<sup>56</sup> The fourteen principles were signed and approved by the high priests of the nations who were present at a conference held in Adyar, Madras, on the 8-12 January 1891 (A.B, 2434).

54 B.P. Kirthisinghe and M.P. Amarasuriya, *Colonel Henry Steel Olcott: His Service to Buddhism*, (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1981), 15-16.

55 Ibid., 14; For Olcott's influence on Buddhist reformers in Japan, see: Y. Shin'ichi, "Theosophy and Buddhist Reformers in the Middle of the Meiji Period: An Introduction," *Japanese Religions* 34, no. 2 (2009), 119-31.

56 Kirthisinghe and Amarasuriya, *Colonel Olcott*, 17.

Among those who signed were Kozen Gunaratana and Chiezo Tokuzawa (from Japan)<sup>57</sup>; U Hmoay Tha Aung (from Burma); Dharmapala Hevavitarana (from Sri Lanka); and Krishna Chandra Chowdury, by his appointed proxy Maung Tha Dwe (from Chittagong).<sup>58</sup> In this way, the common platform successfully united the leaders of two major schools of Buddhism in Asia.

The Northern and Southern Buddhists' acceptance of the common Buddhist platform signifies the extent of the Theosophical Society's influence on the Buddhist world in the late nineteenth century. It also reflects the sort of cosmopolitanism within the Buddhism world which allowed it to move towards a united platform. In this regard, the Theosophical Society conformed to what Leela Gandhi calls "affective communities" which refers to communities in which people mixed freely in the spirit of equality and solidarity regardless of their backgrounds in order to resist imperialism.<sup>59</sup>

Moreover, the extent of Theosophical Society's success in these countries was uneven. Burma is an example of this. Despite the fact that the Burmese Buddhist authorities had agreed to the Buddhist common platform, the Theosophical Society in Burma was not able to achieve as much as it had in Sri Lanka. However, the Society was able to influence some monks in the country.

The impact of the Theosophists on the development of Buddhism in Burma can be traced back to British colonial times during King Thibaw's reign. Olcott first arrived in Burma in January 1885 at the invitation of King Thibaw who had apparently learned about Olcott's contribution to the Sinhalese Buddhist revival.<sup>60</sup> Olcott's first visit to Burma was brief due to Blavatsky's illness. However, he returned again, rejoined his fellow Theosophist Leadbeater in Rangoon and commenced his work after Blavatsky's condition improved.<sup>61</sup>

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57 The Japanese signatories represent at least seven groups of Northern Buddhists such as the *Shingon Shu*, *Nichiren Shu*, *Zen Shu*, *Jodo Shu*, *Ji-Shu Shu*, *Jodo Seizen Shu* and *Tendai Shu*.

58 Kirthisinghe and Amarasuriya, *Colonel Olcott*, 17-18.

59 L. Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought and the Politics of Friendship* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 122.

60 Despite the invitation from King Thibaw, Olcott described the king as "a henpecked despot, whose hands were dyed in innocent blood, whose mind full of plots, stratagems and politics and who was not likely to do any good to my wards, the Buddhist of Ceylon..." The rest of his report focussed the king's brother who was a monk and a *Sangharaja* (Buddhist Royal High Priest) with whom Olcott had a positive relationship. *The Theosophist* XII, no. 6 (March 1891), 323-32.

61 *Ibid.*, 323.

Olcott travelled throughout the country in order to introduce the platform. Aside from giving lectures throughout the country, he assisted in the translation of the *Buddhist Catechism* into the Burmese language. He also succeeded in having the *The Fourteen Fundamental Principles of Buddhism* endorsed by the *Thatanabaing* (Burmese Buddhist patriarch), who was the brother of King Thibaw.

Olcott organized the local Theosophical Society into three branches. The first branch was for Burmese Buddhists; the second branch was for Hindus; and the third branch was for Europeans interested in mesmerism.<sup>62</sup>

The approach that Olcott used in Sri Lanka was the same one he used in Burma to begin a Buddhist revival there. During a council meeting in Mandalay he highlighted the Theosophical Society's achievements in the field of Buddhistic exegesis and propaganda in Sri Lanka. He also alluded to the Sinhalese's zeal for resisting Christian missionary efforts, numerous religious publications, English journals, such as the *Sandaresa* and *The Buddhist*, and some statistics about Buddhist boys and girls who were enrolled in schools established by the Theosophical Society.<sup>63</sup> To highlight his goal of forming a united Buddhist world, Olcott pointed out that at the 1881 Adyar council meeting Japanese Buddhists had united despite the fact that they came from various schools of Buddhism.<sup>64</sup>

Olcott also attempted to create a Buddhist organization in the country. He wrote, "I availed some leisure time here to draft a scheme for a National Buddhist society, with a subsidiary network of township and village societies to share and systematize on a national scale the work of Buddhist revival and propaganda."<sup>65</sup> Stephen Prothero provides detailed information about the formation of the International Buddhist League, which was then subdivided into the National Buddhist League and the Local Buddhist Brotherhoods. These two subdivisions had different objectives. The National Buddhist League aimed to work for the promotion of Buddhism throughout the world and to draw Buddhists together into a brotherly relationship. The later Local Buddhist Brotherhoods promoted local interests such as grant-in-aid Buddhist Schools, the publication and circulation of religious literature, assistance to

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62 Ibid., 323; Prothero, *The White Buddhist*, 118.

63 *The Theosophist* XII, no. 6 (March 1891), 328.

64 Ibid., 328.

65 Ibid., 325.

poor pagodas, support for priests, repairs for temples and other religious structures, and projects for the revival and spread of Buddhism.<sup>66</sup>

Despite Olcott's effort, the Theosophical Society in Burma did not yield satisfying outcomes. The establishment of branches of the Theosophical Society in Burma and the International Buddhist League had no significant impact on Buddhism there. The Theosophical Society was then soon dissolved.<sup>67</sup> This was because although Burma and Sri Lanka were both ruled by Britain, Buddhism in Burma had not declined in the ways it had in Sri Lanka. As a result, there was no need for Theosophists to intervene.<sup>68</sup>

Theosophists and Buddhist modernists such as Olcott, Dharmapala, Wentz and Dawa-Sandup shaped the thinking of Shin Ukkattha (1897-1978), a Burmese Buddhist monk activist and nationalist. After studying and traveling in India, he returned to Burma in 1929 where he argued that traditional notions associated with Buddhist cosmology, such as the existence of heaven and hell, should be revised to fit a scientific view of Buddhism cosmology.<sup>69</sup>

The Theosophical Society was also present in the archipelagic region in Southeast Asia. Alan Trevithick, a Buddhism history scholar, calls the Theosophical Society a franchise organization because its branches were found everywhere.<sup>70</sup> Olcott opened the Gautama Lodge on 4 January 1889 with nineteen members to establish the Theosophical Society in Singapore. In the beginning the lodge was initially attached to the Ceylon section.<sup>71</sup> The website of the Singapore Theosophical Society lodge states that the establishment of the Gautama Lodge was one of the latest lodges because it was established thirteen years after the Theosophical Society was founded in New York and only seven years after its headquarters was moved to Adyar, India in 1882.

Nevertheless, the Gautama Lodge was not very active during its first years.

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66 Prothero, *The White Buddhist*, 129.

67 *Ibid.*, 130.

68 Agarwal, *The Buddhist and Theosophical Movement*, 45.

69 K. Crosby and A. Janaka, "All Too Human: the Impact of International Buddhist Networks on the Life and Posthumous Conviction of the Nationalist Monk, Shin Ukkattha (1897-1978)," *Journal of the Irish Society for the Academic Study of Religions* 3, no. 1 (2016), 228.

70 A. Trevithick, *The Revival of Buddhist Pilgrimage at Bodh Gaya (1811-1949)* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2006), 53.

71 <http://www.theosophyasia.net/singapore.htm>, (accessed: 10 November 2016).

The lodge was reorganized, renamed the Singapore Lodge and initiated by the second International president, Annie Besant, on 1 August 1911. However, the lodge became active after 1925 under the leadership of Mensen Fones. It is noted that the lodge did not have an official address and thus meetings were held at different places, mostly at the residences of the members.<sup>72</sup> Some lectures were held at the Victoria Memorial Hall; on other occasions they held at the Ramakrishna Mission.<sup>73</sup>

During its early years the Singapore Lodge hosted important Theosophist figures from outside the country. Local newspapers reported the visits of a number of prominent Theosophists from abroad. For example, George S. Arundale and his wife, Rukmini Devi Arundale,<sup>74</sup> paid a visit to the Singapore Lodge in January 1929 where they were received with hospitality by Singaporean members.<sup>75</sup> Local newspapers also reported lectures and gatherings organized by the Society during the first three decades of the twentieth century. The lecturers and their topics were thoughtful and provocative. One of them was Isabel Devereux, an American Theosophist, who lectured about “Man a Living God” at the Singapore Lodge.<sup>76</sup>

The Singapore newspapers also noted that Theosophists visiting Singapore from abroad would describe the membership of the Singapore Lodge as being “cosmopolitan.” For example, Mr. and Mrs. Albert Powel Warrington,<sup>77</sup> two eminent Theosophist leaders journeying to Java in 1934,

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72 Ibid.

73 *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, (21 February 1936); *The Straits Times* (18 March 1936).

74 Mr. Arundale (1878-1945) was a prominent theosophist who started his career in the Theosophical Society early. In 1934, after the passing of Annie Besant he was appointed as the president of the Theosophical Society. Rukmini Devi Arundale was the talented classical Indian dance whom Arundale married to in 1920. In 1935, assisted by her husband, Rukmini established the World Federation of Young Theosophists of which she became the president. See: <http://www.ts-adyar.org/content/george-sydney-arundale-1878-1945>. (Accessed 10 November 2016).

75 *Malaya Tribune*, (23 January 1929).

76 *The American Straits Times* (11 March 1935).

77 A.P. Warrington was former vice president of The Theosophical Society of the World (1928-1934), who replaced Jinarajadasa and was later replaced by George Arundale in June 1934. Warrington was the founder of the Krotona Institute of Theosophy in America as well as the general secretary of the American section of the Theosophy; See Y. Shin'ichi, “Three Boys on a Great Vehicle: Mahayana

were reported as “particularly struck with the cosmopolitan nature of the members... irrespective of caste, creed or colour.”<sup>78</sup> Another news article on the diamond jubilee of the society noted the diverse ethno-linguistic backgrounds of the Singapore Lodge’s membership, as there were English, Armenian, Russia, Ceylonese, Chinese and Indian members.<sup>79</sup>

While there is an abundance of sources that trace the development of the Theosophical Society in Singapore, only a few sources shed a patchy light on the relationship between Buddhists and Theosophists. The most revealing source is Anagarika Dhammapala’s journal which described Henry Olcott’s coming to Singapore in 1889. Dhammapala notes that Olcott was renowned among the Ceylonese in Singapore<sup>80</sup> which is probably accurate considering how remarkably influential the Society was in colonial Sri Lanka at the time.

Another source is the website of the Theosophical Society which mentions P.D. de Silva as the first chairperson of the Theosophical Society. De Silva was both a prominent colonial Sri Lankan Buddhist and Theosophist in Singapore which suggests that Buddhists and Theosophists collaborated closely with each other.<sup>81</sup>

A third example that suggests a close relationship between the Theosophists and Buddhist missionaries can be inferred from the connection between C. Jinarajadasa, an ex-vice president of the Theosophical Society, and Bhikku Narada, a colonial Sri Lankan monk. The two travelled together to Java in 1934. Jinarajadasa accompanied Narada during the latter’s visit to Java. During their stay in Singapore, Jinarajadasa was scheduled to deliver a lecture on “Theosophists and the Coming of World Order” at the Victoria Memorial Hall.<sup>82</sup> In March 1936, the same speaker was also recorded to have had given another speech about titled “The Doctrine of Ataman” at the Koona Vayloo

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Buddhism and a Transnational Network,” *Contemporary Buddhism: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 14 (2013), 60.

78 *Malaya Tribune*, (9 October 1934); *Mercantile Advertiser* (9 October 1934).

79 *Sunday Tribune (Singapore)*, (27 October 1935).

80 ADC January 23 1889 in A. Trevithick, “The Theosophical Society and Its Subaltern Acolytes (1880-1986),” *Marburg Journal of Religion* 13, no. 1 (May 2008), 19.

81 <http://www.theosophyasia.net/singapore.htm>, (Accessed 10 November 2016).

82 *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, (21 February 1936); M. Ramstedt, “Colonial Encounters between India and Indonesia,” in B. Sinha (ed.), *South Asian Transnationalisms: Cultural Exchange in the Twentieth Century* (Hoboken, NJ: Taylor and Francis, 2014), 69.

Pillay Hall, Ramakrishna Mission premises on Norris Road.<sup>83</sup>

The above discussion suggests that the Theosophical Society in 1930s Singapore served as a temporary stop for members of the Society coming from abroad before they moved on to Java. In 1925, the members of the Theosophical Society in Singapore considered establishing a connection with the Java section. The attempt, however, was short-lived because of the different languages used in their publications. The Singapore Lodge used English while the Java section used Dutch.<sup>84</sup> Thus, the Theosophical Society in Singapore redirected its affiliation to Adyar instead. However, Singapore remained strategic for the Theosophical Society in its efforts to link Indonesia with the Society's global network.

### 2.1.3. The Theosophical Society in Indonesia

In Indonesia, the presence of the Theosophical Society can be traced back to the colonial period. In 1883, Baron von Tenggagell, a German, initiated the first Theosophical Society lodge in the small city of Pekalongan, Central Java.<sup>85</sup> However, the lodge did not flourish and it was formally closed in 1895 after the passing of the founder in 1893 in Bogor.<sup>86</sup>

A second attempt was made to re-establish the Theosophical Society in Semarang in 1901. The timing of this attempt coincided with the growing popularity in colonial Indonesia of belonging to a "modern" organization like the Masons, the Order of Eastern Star, Christian Mission groups or the Theosophical Society.<sup>87</sup> Moreover, the Theosophical Society's attempts to reorganize also coincided with the colonial government's introduction of the Ethical Policy that aimed to improve the socio-economic conditions of

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83 *The Straits Times*, (18 March 1936).

84 <http://www.theosophyasia.net/singapore.html>; *Theosofie in Nederlandsch-Indië = Theosophie di tanah Hindia Nederland: Officieel Orgaan van de Nederlandsch-Indische Theosofische Vereeniging* (June 1927), 185-86.

85 A lodge had a minimum seven members and it needed official permission from the society's headquarters in Adyar, India. See, Nugraha, *Teosofi, Nationalism*, 8; H.A.O. de Tollenaere, *The Politics of Divine Wisdom: Theosophy Nijmegen*, 1996), 36.

86 De Tollenaere, *The Politics of Divine Wisdom*, 281.

87 R. van Niel, *The Emergence of the Modern Indonesian Elite* (The Hague: W. van Hoeve, 1960), 14.



Indonesians. The Society supported the Ethical Policy as will be explained below, and so the government supported the Theosophical Society's reorganization.

The re-established Theosophical Society began with about fifty registered members and Van Nieuwenhoven Hellbach as its first president and it was directly attached to the Theosophical Society in Metropole, the Netherlands. Thereafter, the Society's name underwent three changes from *Het Dag in Het Oosten* to *Eerste Nederland-Indië Theosofische Vereeniging* and finally to *Centraal Indië Loge der Theosofische Vereeniging*.<sup>88</sup>

The Theosophical Society immediately began to expand its membership. This move was led by a Dutchman, A.P. van Asperen van de Velde, who distributed brochures inviting interested persons to join the Society.<sup>89</sup> As a result, the Society soon spread to Surabaya (1903), Yogyakarta (1904) and Surakarta (1905). For his efforts, Asperen van de Velde was awarded the title of *De Geestelijke Vader der Loge* (The Founding Father of the Lodge).<sup>90</sup> De Tollenaere, a Dutch scholar, notes that in 1903 an additional five lodges were established in Bandung, Batavia, Klaten, Medan and Malang.<sup>91</sup>

The Theosophical Society spread its influence to the Javanese elite class under Dirk van Hinloopen Labberton's presidency from 1912/1913 to 1930).<sup>92</sup> Van Hinloopen Labberton (1874-1961) arrived in Indonesia in 1893 and started his career as a chemical analyst in the sugar industry in Gajam Pasuruan, East Java. Being linguistically gifted, he studied the Malay and Javanese languages and the geography and ethnology of the archipelago, especially of Java. He became a teacher at the *Gymnasium Willem III* in Batavia from 1904 to 1913.<sup>93</sup> The Theosophical Society supported the Ethical Policy and the emancipation of Indonesians from poverty.<sup>94</sup> When Van Hinloopen

88 Nugraha, *Teosofi, Nasionalisme*, 9.

89 *Ibid.*, 19.

90 *Ibid.*, 9.

91 De Tollenaere, *The Politics of Divine Wisdom*, 281.

92 The leadership of Van Hinloopen Labberton was briefly interrupted when was replaced by J.J. Kuisheer because he went to Japan. After returning from Japan Van Hinloopen Labberton re-assumed his position until he was succeeded by Kuisheer in 1930.

93 F. Tichelman, "Hinloopen Labberton, Dirk van (1874-1961)," in *Biografisch Woordenboek van Nederland*, URL:<http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/bwn1880-2000/lemmata/bwn4/hinloop>. (Accessed 2 April 2018).

94 Tichelman, "Hinloopen Labberton, Dirk van (1874-1961)," (Accessed: 2 April



**Figure 2.1.** Van Hinloopen Labberton with the committee of *Javaanse Cultuurontwikkeling* (Javanese Cultural Development) in Surakarta (5-7 July 1918). (First row from left to right: R.M.A. Woerjaningrat, Pangeran Hadiwijoyo, R. Sastro Widjono (president), Dr. Radjiman Wediodipoero, Z.H. Pangeran Adipati Ario Praboe Prangwedono (honorary president), S. Koperberg (secretary). Second row from left to right: Dr. Satiman Wirjosandjojo, Z. Stokvis, D. van Hinloopen Labberton, dr. Tjipto Mangoenkoesomo, J. Rottier, A. Mühlenfeld, R.M.S. Soeriokoesoemo.) Source: KITLV (FD941).`

Labberton (an early supporter of the Ethical Policy) became president of the Theosophical Society, its support for the Ethical Policy helped him enter into Javanese elite circles. He was able to have a certain amount of influence with young Javanese elites, among whom were Tjipto Mangoenkoesomo,<sup>95</sup> H.S Tjokroaminoto and other future young nationalist leaders,<sup>96</sup> because of his understanding of Javanese culture and fluency in the Javanese language.

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2018); Nugraha, *Teosofi, Nasionalisme*, 25.

95 One of the founders of the *Indische Partij* later changed to *Insulinde*.

96 L.J. Sears, "Intellectuals, Theosophy, and Failed Narratives of the Nation in Late Colonial Java," in H. Schwarz and S. Ray (eds), *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 337; Takashi indicates Van Hinloopen Labberton was the theosophy teacher or *guru* of Tjipto Mangoenkoesomo. T. Shiraishi, *Zaman Bergerak: Radikalisme Rakyat di Jawa 1912-1926* (Jakarta: Pustaka Utama Grafiti, 1997), 171 and 231.

By 1906, Indonesia’s Theosophical Society had 200 members, most of whom were Europeans. Due to its growth, the Society headquarters in Adyar promoted the Indonesian branch to the status of an autonomous chapter with Annie Besant announcing “it is pleasant to chronicle the formation of a National Society in Java, which now feels strong enough to stand on its own feet, without the support of its mother, the Theosophical Society in the Netherlands.”<sup>97</sup>

The new Indonesian branch continued to grow for many reasons, although the one advanced by Robert van Niel, a Dutch American working on Southeast Asian history, is the emergence of the Indische Partij (Indies’ Party) in 1911, which favoured East Indian nationalism rather than Javanese or Indonesian nationalism. This contributed to disenchanting Javanese joining the Society, which had formed a close relationship with the Javanese upper class.<sup>98</sup> Table 2.1 summarizes the changes in the Society’s membership in Indonesia between 1913 and 1935.

**Table 2.1.** Changes in the Theosophical Society’s Membership, 1913 and 1935

Race	1913 <sup>#1</sup>	1926 <sup>#2</sup>	1927 <sup>#3</sup>	1935 <sup>#4</sup>
European	331	982	1027	577
Indonesian	177	770	851	524
Chinese	25	183	197	191
<b>Total</b>	<b>533</b>	<b>1935</b>	<b>2075</b>	<b>1232</b>

#1 De Tollenaere, *The Politics of Divine Wisdom*, 107.

#2 *Theosofie in Nederlandsch-Indië = Theosophie di Tanah Hindia Nederland: Officieel Orgaan van de Nederlandsch-Indische Theosofische Vereeniging* (June 1927), no page.

#3 *Ibid.*, (May 1928), 152-53.

#4 *Ibid.*, (April 1935), 63.

By 1927, the Society had grown to forty lodges and eleven centres across colonial Indonesia.<sup>99</sup> The decrease in its membership also affected the existing numbers such that there were only twenty-five lodges and twenty centres in

97 Besant, *Theosophy*, 327.

98 Van Niel, *The Emergence of the Modern*, 63.

99 *Theosofie in Nederlandsch-Indië*; (May 1928), 152-53.

the whole of Indonesia.<sup>100</sup>

There was a continuous increase in membership between 1913 and 1927 among all racial groups of members. However, the total membership decreased by more than one-third between 1927 and 1935. Van Niel offered a reason for why the Society lost its appeal. He stated that starting from 1916 the Society was the only modern organization (aside from the Indische Partij) that had a policy of inclusive membership based on a brotherhood traversing race and belief. In contrast, the other modern organizations maintained a policy of exclusive membership, so the Society no longer fit the preferred notion of a modern organization.<sup>101</sup>

Nugraha puts forth another reason. According to him the Society's loss of members stemmed from two causes: a schism among the leaders of the Theosophy Society's international headquarters in Adyar and the rise of the Indonesian nationalist movement. Both situations led to people leaving the society and, in some cases, joining other organizations with more overt political aims.<sup>102</sup>

Despite its declining membership, the Theosophical Society in Indonesia remained cosmopolitan. As described in the preceding section, the Theosophical Society in Indonesia attracted Europeans, Javanese and Chinese. As noted above, the Javanese elite showed great interest in joining the Theosophical Society when the Ethical Policy was implemented. According to Van Niel, the Society was able to inspire Hollanders while at the same time opening the way for Indonesians to aspire for a better future.<sup>103</sup> For instance, the Javanese elites were directly affected by the Ethical Policy because they now had access to western training and the liberal social philosophy of the West.<sup>104</sup>

The case of Dr. Radjiman is an example. He was a member of the Theosophical Society before he went to Europe where he read deeply into the philosophy of Kant, Hegel and Bergson. He was trained in medicine and became a physician in the Netherlands. He later became a physician to the Susuhunan of Surakarta. He combined Javanese culture with the Theosophical Society's philosophy of brotherhood, syncretic religion and the

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100 *Theosofie in Nederlandsch-Indië*, (April 1935), 63.

101 Van Niel, *The Emergence of the Modern*, 129.

102 Nugraha, *Teosofi, Nasionalisme*, 22.

103 Van Niel, *The Emergence of the Modern*, 9.

104 *Ibid.*, 45.

mystic potency of life. The alignment of Javanese culture with the philosophy of the Theosophical Society was a cosmopolitanism that the Indonesian elite desired.<sup>105</sup> This desire led a number of elite and educated Javanese to become members of the Theosophical Society.

#### 2.1.4. The Theosophical Society and Buddhism in Indonesia

Several studies have investigated the involvement of the Theosophical Society in the revival of Buddhism in Indonesia. Iem Brown states that the resurgence of Buddhism in Indonesia was fuelled by Europeans, particularly those involved in the scientific study of religions and in search of what some called the “wisdom of the East.” In an article titled *The Revival of Buddhism in Modern Indonesia*, she briefly highlights the influence of the Theosophical Society members.<sup>106</sup> Yoneo Ishii’s fuller article credits the Theosophists with the revival of Buddhism in Indonesia and argues that their participation in the Buddhist world of Indonesia came before Bhikkhu Narada’s 1934 visit to Java.<sup>107</sup> Another researcher, Marieke Bloembergen, focuses on the involvement of the Theosophical Society in the resacralization of Borobudur.<sup>108</sup> However, these articles raise unanswered questions about the relationship between Indonesia’s Buddhists and Theosophists.

This section analyses the involvement of the Theosophical Society members in the emergence of Buddhism in late colonial Indonesia. In this regard, the discussion will focus on two aspects of the Theosophical Society’s involvement in the making of Indonesian Buddhism: the resacralization of religious sites and the production of Buddhist knowledge.

The Theosophical Society treated old religious sites with the highest

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105 Ibid., 54.

106 I. Brown, “The Revival of Buddhism in Modern Indonesia,” in M. Ramstedt (ed.), *Hinduism in Modern Indonesia: A Minority Religion between Local, National and Global Interest* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2004), 45.

107 Y. Ishii, “Modern Buddhism in Indonesia,” in G. Dhammapala, R. Gombrich and K.R. Norman (eds), *Buddhist Studies in Honour of Hammalava Saddhatissa* (Nugegoda: Buddhist Research Library Trust, 1984), 108.

108 M. Bloembergen, “Borobudur in the Light of Asia: Scholars, Pilgrims, and Knowledge Networks of Greater India,” in M. Laffan (ed.), *Belonging Across the Bay of Bengal: Religious Rites, Colonial Migrations, National Rights* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 35-55.

respect and wished to “resacralize” them because a “historical site played an important role in the Theosophical Society’s activities which aimed to fuse the worlds of East and West into symbolic paraphernalia of Theosophical ideas, objects of new devotion and pilgrimage and as settings for religious, societal and moral rituals.”<sup>109</sup> The Theosophical Society’s first project was the resacralization of Borobudur under Van Hinloopen Labberton’s leadership. This project is further discussed in Chapter Four.

This dissertation also argues that the Theosophical Society was the principal agent for producing knowledge about Buddhism. This happened in a number of ways. The Theosophical Society organized Buddhist classes and discussions as part of its mission to encourage people of all religions and backgrounds to join the Society. Newspapers announced that classes on Buddhism were being held at various lodges across Java almost on weekly basis. Some classes focused on general topics about Buddhism. These were free of charge and open to the public. One such class was reported as starting on 7 December 1920 and meeting once weekly at the Theosophical Society lodge on Koningsplein W 17.<sup>110</sup> Other classes focused more on specific topics about Buddhism, like the one held at the Dharma Lodge and titled “Wat wil het Boeddisme?” (What does Buddhism want?). It was conducted by D. van Golberdingen.<sup>111</sup>

In the 1930s, more lectures were organized in different places that included other areas, such as Probolinggo in East Java. A theosophist named E.F. Wildervanck was reported to have delivered a lecture on “Het Boeddisme” which explained the Buddha as the founder of Buddhism.<sup>112</sup> The lecture specifically situated the Buddha’s founding of Buddhism in the context of Southern (Theravada) Buddhism, which explained the founding of Buddhism in terms of the Three Jewels of Buddhism, namely the Buddha, the Dhamma (the teaching) and the Sangha (the monk’s congregation).<sup>113</sup> In Malang, East Java, Mangelaar Meertens lectured about Buddhism. He lectured about *Karma*, a fundamental concept in Buddhism.<sup>114</sup> Interestingly

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109 Ibid., 36.

110 *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad* (27 November 1920).

111 *Algemeen Handelsblad* (19 May 1923).

112 *De Indische Courant* (14 January 1935).

113 Ibid.

114 *De Indische Courant*, (9 December 1927).

the lectures were not only about Buddhist teachings but also about Buddhism and Javanese arts, for example, a lecture delivered by A.H. Kroes about “Het Boeddhisme en Zijn Kunst op Java” (Buddhism and Its Art in Java).<sup>115</sup> The Theosophical Society regarded classes on Buddhism essential to the process of introducing Buddhism to Indonesian audiences.

Brown points out that the Peranakan Chinese acquired knowledge of Buddhism mainly from two sources -- the Theosophical Society and the Java Buddhist Association.<sup>116</sup> As noted above, the Peranakan Chinese were among those invited to attend lectures on Buddhism.<sup>117</sup> As mentioned earlier, several Peranakan Chinese, such as Kwee Tek Hoay, were prominent members of the Theosophical Society. The encounter between the Peranakan Chinese and the Theosophical Society was not only a major source of knowledge about Buddhism, it also inspired the Peranakan Chinese to establish their own Buddhist association and to maintain a connection with the Theosophical Society as indicated by their invitations to Theosophists to deliver talks on Buddhism at the Batavia Buddhist Association.

Before the formation of the Batavia Buddhist Association, the Theosophical Society collaborated with the Java Buddhist Association to celebrate Vesak in 1932.<sup>118</sup> During Bhikkhu Narada’s visit to Java (4-24 March 1934), the monk gave several lectures at Theosophical Society lodges in Bandung and Buitenzorg.<sup>119</sup> After the formation of the Batavia Buddhist Association, Theosophists frequently gave lectures at the Association’s centre in Batavia. Prominent Javanese Theosophists, such as Kadiroen, lectured on Buddhism to the new association. In the 1930s, Ong Soe Aan, who was the chairperson of Giri Lojo (the Theosophical Society’s lodge in Bandung), invited Sri Lankan monks to visit the archipelago for the first time in 1934.<sup>120</sup> The invitation was co-arranged together with the abovementioned Kwee Tek Hoay.

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115 *Nieuwe Apeldoornsche Courant*, 19 March 1932).

116 Brown, “The Revival of Buddhism,” 48.

117 *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, (27 November 1920).

118 *Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, (23 May 1935).

119 *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, (16 March 1934).

120 This part of history later became the most popular part on the revival of Buddhism in Indonesia. In fact, most of the local history of Buddhism started from the point when the Sri Lankan monks came to Indonesia. See Brown, “The Revival of Buddhism,” 47.



The Theosophical Society became a channel through which intellectuals in colonial Indonesia, both native Indonesians and Peranakan Chinese, learned about Buddhism. This, in turn, led to these intellectuals, particularly the Peranakans, to contribute to the building of networks that further spread Buddhism in Indonesia.

## 2.2. THE JAVA BUDDHIST ASSOCIATION (JBA)

### 2.2.1. The Founders

The Java Buddhist Association (JBA) was the first Buddhist organization established in colonial Indonesia. It was founded by Ernest Erle Power (hereafter E.E. Power) as the chairperson and Willem Josias van Dienst as the deputy chairperson.

Little is known about the personal background of the founders. However, what is known shows that the Western connection to Buddhism happened outside of Indonesia but that some individuals came to Indonesia bringing Buddhism with them. Inspired by Carolien Stolte's "mapping a life, mapping a network" in her study of the struggle of Raja Mahendra Pratap against imperialism in his travels outside the country,<sup>121</sup> this section focuses on individuals who established important religious sites as a result of their travels.

The personal background of E.E. Power (1886-1953) is rather enigmatic. A document from the US Department of Labor Naturalization Service reveals that he was born of British parents on 25 February 1886 in Vorden, the Netherlands. It also stated that Power had been living in Boston since March 1911 and was working as an assistant manager at an unspecified company. In the year that the World War I ended (1918), Power filed a petition for becoming a US citizen; he was granted citizenship in the same year.<sup>122</sup>

It is not known when Power arrived in colonial Indonesia. Still more mysterious is his life in Indonesia and his encounters with other Buddhist

121 C. Stolte, "‘Enough of the Great Napoleons!’ Raja Mahendra Pratap’s Pan-Asian Project (1929-1939)," *Modern Asian Studies* 46 (2012), 407.

122 Petition no. 26992, date signed 2 May 1918. He was eventually granted the citizenship with the date of admission stated as 16 September 1918. "Power, Ernest Erle," Records of District Courts of the United States, 1685-2009 (Record group 21). Series: Name Index to Petitions and Records of Naturalization, ca. 1900-1991. File ID: 65323130 (consulted at: <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/65323130>).



networks, in particular about his collaboration with Josias van Dienst. Power's name is listed as a member of the organizing committee for the Joint Agreement of Churches for a "Universal Religious and Spiritual Mission" which was held in Chicago on 25 June 1933.<sup>123</sup> Another source indicates that at one point, Power went to Sri Lanka to volunteer at the Maha Bodhi College.<sup>124</sup>

Power authored several books on Buddhism. One of these is considered as the most important book for the development of Buddhism, *The Path of the Elders: A Modern Exposition of Ancient Buddhism* which was published in 1928. The book was translated into Malay and became one of the most referred books in the early twentieth century during the emergence of Buddhism in colonial Indonesia. Kwee Tek Hoay called the translated version a one-of-a-kind book.<sup>125</sup> Several of Power's lectures were also transcribed and translated into Malay and then published in the *Sam Kauw Gwat Po* journal. In 1953, an obituary announced his passing. It called for relatives or friends to provide information about him.<sup>126</sup> This record is the only one that indicates his continuous presence in Java throughout World War II and Post-Independence Indonesia.

The second important figure in the JBA is the deputy chairperson, Willem Josias van Dienst.<sup>127</sup> Van Dienst was born on 3 June 1897 in Den Haag, the Netherlands. Before he went to colonial Indonesia, Van Dienst worked as an instructor at the Theological College of the Salvation Army in Rotterdam (1917-1920). He also worked as bookkeeper and correspondent at

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123 The event was attended by at least 39 people from various religious organizations and religious leaders from various continents including Asia. Among the many religious leaders, Dharmapala was a member of the Missions Committee. I suspect that such an event was important to Power for networking with the other members. See the Joint Agreement of Churches for a "Universal Religious and Spiritual Mission," [www.revista-ariel.org](http://www.revista-ariel.org).

124 Power rebuked Dharmapala for being treated very poorly during his stay in Sri Lanka. See S. Kemper, *Rescued from the Nation: Anagarika Dharmapala and the Buddhist World* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 414.

125 Kwee Tek Hoay, "Salinan Melajoe dari boekoe: The Path of the Elders" *Sam Kauw Gwat Po: Orgaan dari Batavia Buddhist Association, Sam Kauw Hwe Batavia, Menado dan Telokbetong*, 47 (August 1938), no page.

126 *Java-Bode: Nieuws, Handels en Advertentieblad voor Netherlandsch-Indië*, (14 October 1953).

127 For quite some time, Van Dienst's name was listed as Josias van Dienst until more archival findings revealed his complete name as Willem Josias van Dienst.

Richard Oswald's film bureau in Rotterdam. In 1921, he moved to colonial Indonesia, where he initially worked as an accountant for the Indische Handels Company (1921-1924) and then as a salesman for various companies, such as the Java Ford Import Company, the Good Year Rubber Company and the Fiat Import Company (1924-1929). In 1929, he established his own bureau of translation and legal advice for small businesses, but it was unsuccessful and went bankrupt in 1932.<sup>128</sup>

Van Dienst started privately studying Buddhism in the late 1920s. He was then ordained as a Buddhist priest in 1932 and remained active in the priestly service for the next three years.<sup>129</sup> In *The Buddhist* magazine, Van Dienst wrote that he was ordained as an *upasaka* (Buddhist lay follower) of the Right Reverend Maha Upasaka U. Mg. Hla from Thaton, Burma.<sup>130</sup>

In 1935, Van Dienst went to Japan to raise financial support for the Buddhist movement in Java.<sup>131</sup> He lived about ten months in the Empukuji monastery near Yawata, Kyoto. The origin of Van Dienst's connection with the monastery is rather unclear. However, it is likely that Van Dienst learned about the Empukuji monastery's hospice program which was designed to facilitate the study of Zen Buddhism from the magazine, *The Buddhist*,<sup>132</sup> because he subscribed to it. This information corresponds to that in *Sam Kaww Gwat Po*, a Peranakan Chinese magazine, which mentioned that Van Dienst was ordained as a Zen Buddhist priest during his stay in Japan.<sup>133</sup>

Van Dienst decided to return to Japan together with his family in 1936.

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128 National Archive, The Hague. Netherland Forces Intelligence Service [NEFIS] en Centrale Militaire Inlichtingendienst [CMI] in Nederlands-Indië, entry no. 2.10.62, inventory no. 806028.

129 Ibid.

130 W. J. van Dienst, "Java Buddhist Association", *The Buddhist*, vol. 4 no. 4 (August 1933), 53.

131 The Buddhist projects included establishing Buddhist school and reviving the magazine, *Nama Buddhaya*. See Kwee Tek Hoay, "Kabar pergerakan Sam Kaww. Centraal Buddhist Instituut", *Sam Kaww Gwat Po: Orgaan dari Batavia Buddhist Association, Sam Kaww Hwe Batavia, Menado dan Telokbetong*, (February 1936), 39. However, he was unable to raise funds for these projects. Also see: National Archive, The Hague. NEFIS and CMI in Nederlands-Indië, entry no. 2.10.62, inventory no. 806028.

132 Van Dienst was found to have written a short self-introduction of himself, his Buddhist background and his work in Java which was published in *The Buddhist*. See Van Dienst, "Java Buddhist Association", 4 (August, 1933), 53.

133 Kwee, "Kabar pergerakan Sam Kaww", 39.

This was likely the end of his involvement with the JBA as well. However, a report in the Dutch National Archive notes his conviction for aiding the Japanese during World War II.<sup>134</sup> Van Dienst was accused of aiding the Japanese by making propaganda radio broadcasts, which earned him the sobriquet of the Dutch Lord Haw Haw.<sup>135</sup> For this reason he was sentenced to three years of imprisonment with three years deduction of time spent in preventive detention. He finally received clemency and was released in 1948.<sup>136</sup>

The above discussion shows that the two founders of the JBA were Europeans who arrived in Indonesia in the 1920s. While Power appears to have already had much experience in Buddhist activity prior his activism in Indonesia, Van Dienst started his activism only sometime after having arrived in Indonesia. Nevertheless, a common feature of their backgrounds is that both of them came from very transnational Buddhist backgrounds. Power was a Buddhist activist in America, Sri Lanka and Singapore, while Van Dienst was ordained as a Buddhist priest by a Burmese Buddhist. A second common feature in their backgrounds is that both men followed the traditions of Southern (Theravada) Buddhism, which helps to explain the emergence of Southern Buddhist networks in colonial Indonesia as a new form of Buddhism in Indonesia.

### 2.2.2. The Structure and Characteristics of the JBA

The JBA was formed as the first Buddhist association in colonial Indonesia in August 1929. It was originally called the Association for the Propagation of Buddhism in Java until its name was changed to the Javanese Buddhist Association in order to better accommodate anyone who was Buddhist or

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134 National Archive, The Hague. NEFIS and CMI in Nederlandsch-Indië, entry no. 2.10.62, inventory no. 806028.

135 Lord Haw Haw was originally a nickname applied to William Joyce William who broadcasted Nazi propaganda during the Second World War. *Het Dagblad: Uitgave van de Nederlandsche Dagbladpers te Batavia*, (28 May 1948).

136 F.L. Borch, *Military Trials of War Criminals Trials in the Netherlands Indies 1946-1949* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 198-200; *Het Dagblad*, (28 May 1948); Also see Netherlands Institute of War Documentation (NIOD), Amsterdam. Processen-verbaal van vonnissen van de Temporaire Krijgsraad Batavia tegen Nederlandse onderdanen inzake collaboratie met de Japanse bezetter, afschriften. Inv 407, (no. 16, 1948) Pro Justitia.

was simply interested in Buddhism.<sup>137</sup> The JBA was an extension of the International Buddhist Mission based in Thaton, Burma.

The organization was established with the aim to propagate Buddhism in Indonesia, particularly in Bali and Lombok where, according to Van Dienst, the tradition of ancient Buddhism and Hinduism still prevailed. However, the process of missionary work in Bali was not easy due to the problems arising from the Christian missionaries who had been preaching Christianity and inviting people to convert to Christianity. The Balinese rejected the Christian missionaries' insistence on conversion and forced the colonial government to stop the Christian mission. Thus, the government issued Article 177 of the Netherlands Indies State Rules and Regulations forbidding Christian mission work in Bali.<sup>138</sup> Learning from the Christian missionaries' failure, the JBA filed a petition with the colonial government to obtain a proper licence to carry out its Buddhist mission. While waiting for this licence the JBA published a magazine called *Nama Buddhaya*.<sup>139</sup>

The JBA was the first Buddhist organization established in Indonesia for sole aim to carry out missionary work. The founder of the organization referred to the JBA as the pioneer of Buddhist missionary organizations.<sup>140</sup> It was founded with the main purpose of resuscitating Buddhism, particularly in Java:

It will not be a difficult task to convert Java. Buddhism is in the hearts of the people, at the very bottom of their souls. The Javanese soul is created by Buddhism and it will never find rest till it kneels down again at the foot of the *Thatagatha*, saying: "*Buddhay sarana gacchami*, I go to the Buddha for refuge."<sup>141</sup>

The JBA was also the first transnational Buddhist group to be established

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137 *Nama Buddhaya. Orgaan van de Java Section der International Buddhist Mission, Thaton-Burma, alsmede van the Java Buddhist Association, Gevestigd te Buitenzorg*, 1 (1933); Ishii, "Modern Buddhism in Indonesia," 109.

138 W.J. van Dienst, "Buddhist working in Java and Bali", *The Buddhist*, vol. 4. no. 6 (October 1933), 79.

139 *Ibid.*, 79.

140 Van Dienst, "Present religious condition", 389. Several newspapers published reports about the organization when it was first established, for example, *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, 04 November 1929; *De Indische Courant*, (11 October 1929).

141 This was in the article written by van Dienst as a plea to the world Buddhist brethren for help. See Van Dienst, "Present religious condition", 389.

beyond the nation-state in modern Indonesia and undertake what Ishii calls Buddhist evangelism.<sup>142</sup>

It is important also to recognize the individuals who were involved in the JBA. Unlike the Theosophical Society, which kept records on its membership, the JBA did not do so. Van Dienst only recorded information about the presence of Buddhists in Java. In his short article published in *The Buddhist* journal, he stated that the Buddhists in Java were mainly Chinese. He claimed that there were as many as five million Chinese who were professed Buddhists, but there are no sources to support his claim. There were at least thirty Europeans and an unspecified number of Javanese who particularly adhered to Javanese culture, traditions and *Igama Koeno*, the old religion of the island.<sup>143</sup> Additionally, there were a few Indians who appreciated the work that the JBA had done because Buddhism was an Indian religion.<sup>144</sup>

Van Dienst's article about Buddhism in Java sheds light about individuals who were involved in the JBA. He felt that the JBA was a poor organization and pointed out that it had very limited financial support from very few individuals and organizations. Among the JBA's supporters were the Indian Association in Batavia, an individual donor named A. van der Velde and the chairperson of the organization, E.E. Power.<sup>145</sup> He also said that there were times when the organization could not afford to buy stamps to mail letters. In short, the organization heavily relied on donations from Buddhist enthusiasts. Van Dienst also described himself as not financially secure and able to support the association.<sup>146</sup>

Exasperated, Van Dienst sent a plea to Buddhist societies all over the world asking for their support for the JBA's missionary work in Java. He wrote

To our other brethren in all parts of the worlds, to whom may come this plea, we wish to say: the whole world longs for happiness, for freedom from suffering and for Peace. The law of the Buddha gives a better way to Eternal Peace than all human laws and Peace Conferences. Help us to give this part of the world the greatest gift man ever can give, and remember that the gift of law excels all others gifts.<sup>147</sup>

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142 Ishii, *Modern Buddhism in Indonesia*, 109.

143 Van Dienst, "Present religious condition", 388-89.

144 Ibid., 388-89

145 Van Dienst, "Buddhist working in Java", 79.

146 Ibid., 79

147 Ibid., 80.

The above quotation demonstrates the existing linkages and networks between the JBA and other Buddhist organizations and societies outside colonial Indonesia. The quotation also mentions the power of linkages to raise awareness about the JBA's on-going Buddhist missionary work in Indonesia.

In addition to opening up new connections and networks to support Buddhist missionary work, the JBA used the print technology to connect people in different places. Abigail Green, a British historian, and V. Viaene, a history and international relations scholar, point out that religious reformers and organizations were among the first to publish mass printed journals and newspapers for international readerships.<sup>148</sup> This dissertation argues that in the Buddhist transnational context, journals were crucial for diffusing knowledge, new ideas and information about Buddhism, as well as raising funds for Buddhist missionary work. The printed Buddhist journals shortened the distance between Buddhists around the world. For instance, *The Buddhist*, a quarterly journal published by the Colombo Young Men's Buddhist Association (1888), circulated widely and reached colonial Indonesia. As a result, Van Dienst became one of *The Buddhist's* active contributors. He listed the following international journals as circulating in Indonesia:

- *Buddhism in Burma* published by the International Buddhist Mission and Buddhist Religious Tract Society, Thaton, Burma;
- *Peace*, a journal published by the International Buddhist Union, Singapore;
- *The Maha-Bodhi Journal* published by the Mahabodhi Society, India;
- *The Eastern Buddhist* published by the Eastern Buddhist Society, Kyoto, Japan; and
- *The British Buddhist* published by the Buddhist Mission, British Mahabodhi Society, London.<sup>149</sup>

Print journals became crucial for Buddhist activists in Indonesia to communicate with Buddhists and Buddhists sympathizers. It is also obvious that most Buddhist organizations, including the JBA, published journals and magazines to facilitate the dissemination of their ideas, activities and programs. The JBA alone established at least two print publications, namely the *Nama*

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148 A. Green and V. Viaene. "Introduction: Rethinking Religion and Globalization," in A. Green and V. Viaene (eds), *Religious Internationals in the Modern World. Globalization and Faith Communities since 1750* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 7.

149 W.J. van Dienst, "Goede Boeddhistische tijdschriften zijn", *Nama Buddhaya*, 1 (1933), 20.

*Buddhaya* (1933) and *De Dhamma* in the Nederlandsch-Indië: Officieel Orgaan van het Central Boeddhistisch Instituut voor Java (The Central Buddhist Institute for Java) (1934).<sup>150</sup>

The content of the first edition of *Nama Buddhaya* identified the distinctive characteristics of Southern Buddhism. One of the journal's distinctive characteristics was the use of the Pāli language in its opening page. It also featured *Pansil* (also *Pancasila* Buddhist), the five rules of Buddhist moral conduct. In this dissertation, *Pancasila* is used.<sup>151</sup> The journal started with three verses that paid homage to the historical Buddha, followed by verses about taking refuge in the Triple Gems (*Tisarana*) -- the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha (the Bhikkhu assembly) -- and the five rules of moral conduct for Buddhist laypeople. The *Pancasila* Buddhist was the vow taken by Olcott when he converted into Buddhism in Sri Lanka.<sup>152</sup> The *Pancasila* also includes some verses from the Buddhist canon called *Dhammapada*.<sup>153</sup> Other Southern Buddhism characteristic that appears in the journal is the Pali verse *Nammo Tassa Bhagavato Arāhato Sammāsambuddhassa* (homage to Him, the Blessed One, the Worthy One, the Fully Enlightened One).<sup>154</sup>

### 2.2.3. The Encounter with Peranakan Chinese Society

The collaboration between the JBA and the Peranakan Chinese is seen as the first “official” connection between the two schools of Buddhism in Indonesia. As the pioneer Buddhist organization, the JBA established ties with other various organizations, including Peranakan Chinese organizations. However, the JBA did not originally plan to operate in the heart of colonial Indonesia,

150 Both publications were short-lived and terminated after publishing two editions due to insufficient financial support.

151 W.J. van Dienst, “Pansil”, *Nama Buddhaya*, 1 (1933), 3.

152 D.S. Lopez, Jr., *Buddhism and Science: Guide for the Perplexed* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 11.

153 W.J. van Dienst, “Enkele teksten uit het Dharmapada”, *Nama Buddhaya* 1 (1933), 15-16.

154 Ibid., 15-16; *Nama Buddhaya*, 2 (1934), W.J. van Dienst, “Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa”, *De Dharma In Nederlandsch-Indië: Officieel Orgaan van het Centraal Boeddhistisch Instituut voor Java*, 1 (August 1934), 1.; W.J. van Dienst, “Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa” *De Dharma in Nederlandsch-Indië: Officieel Orgaan van het Centraal Boeddhistisch Instituut voor Java*, 2 (September 1934), 1.

Batavia. It originally aimed to introduce Buddhism in Bali and Lombok<sup>155</sup> because they were part of the Majapahit kingdom (the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries) whose rulers favoured Buddhism and Hinduism. The JBA's original purpose was to resurrect the past glory of Hinduism and Buddhism and reverse Christian missionary attempts to replace Hindu and Buddhist values with Christian values.<sup>156</sup> The leaders of the JBA sought support from the Balinese and Lombok leaders. Goesti Anak Agoeng Barajang Wangsa, the youngest son of the King of Lombok, extended his support and permitted Buddhist missionaries to spread Buddhism in his territory.<sup>157</sup>

However, the JBA also became interested in spreading Buddhism to other parts of Indonesia, more specifically to Batavia. One goal of the JBA was to introduce Theravada Buddhism. This goal led the JBA to investigate the status of Buddhism elsewhere in Indonesia. The investigators found the Peranakan Chinese, who traditionally followed Northern Buddhism, to be open to Theravada Buddhism. This prompted the JBA to become the first transnational Buddhist organization to introduce Theravada Buddhism to the Peranakan Chinese community.

The JBA established a good relationship with the local Peranakan Chinese Buddhists in Batavia, which started with a meeting on 16 January 1934 at Klenteng Kwan Im Tong on Jalan Prinselaan, Batavia. The meeting was attended by klenteng officials, namely, the Rev. Lin Feng Fei, a Northern (Mahayana) Buddhist monk (*hweshio*) and head of the klenteng, and Chiu Yin Ho, a graduate from Shanghai College and the resident of Klenteng Kwan Im Tong, and JBA representatives, namely, Kwee Tek Hoay, Van Dienst and Tjoa Hin Hoeij. Van Dienst initiated discussion forums with the Chinese community in the Klenteng Kwan Im Tong.<sup>158</sup> The meeting highlighted the need to reform the klenteng, but no decisions resulting from the first meeting

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155 Kwee Tek Hoay, "berbangkitnja kembali Agama Buddha", *Moestika Dharma; Maandblad Tentang Agama, Kabatinan dan Filosofie*, 19 (October 1933), 687.

156 *Ibid.*, 687.

157 *Ibid.*, 687.

158 Kwee Tek Hoay, "Beroending di Kwan Im Tong", *Moestika Dharma Moestika Dharma; Maandblad Tentang Agama, Kabatinan dan Filosofie*, 24 (March 1934), 879.



were recorded. However, another meeting was set for 21 January 1934.<sup>159</sup>

Van Dienst (wearing the attire of a Buddhist priest) arrived at the second meeting in the company of T'jiam Kim Hoat and T'joa Hin Hoeij, Peranakan Chinese from the klenteng. The second meeting was attended by twelve people which included another four Mahayana Buddhist monks residing in the klenteng.<sup>160</sup> Upon his arrival, Van Dienst performed a gesture of respect in front of the Buddha statue on the altar and gave an opening speech on the topic of whether or not there is Allah.

Clearly inspired by his background as a priest in the Southern Buddhist school, Kwee Tek Hoay asked Van Dienst whether or not Allah (the Southern Buddhist name for God or the Supreme Being) should be asked for blessings and good luck. His response obliquely censured the common practice of the klenteng's worshippers who asked for worldly gains. For Van Dienst, doing so was not in accordance with Buddhism.<sup>161</sup>

Van Dienst and the members of the klenteng agreed that they would work together to propagate the philosophy of Buddhism and to reform the klenteng. The account of the meeting stated that "There has arisen a strong desire to reform the function of klenteng, so that the place is not only used for superstitious interests but also as a source for teaching and spiritual knowledge; in addition, the klenteng should not be used to shelter the homeless, but to transform it into a proper religious shrine."<sup>162</sup> The meetings between the JBA members of the Southern Buddhist school and the Peranakan Chinese from the Northern Buddhist school resulted in a joint purpose, which was to improve the deteriorating situation of the klenteng using the Southern Buddhism resources and networks.

It can be argued that the agreement to reform the klenteng was one of the most important results of the meetings between the JBA and the Mahayana Buddhist monks. The issue of reform was important to the Buddhist Peranakan Chinese, who did not yet have places of worship and prayer nor centres to learn about Buddhism. Kwee Tek Hoay predicted, "Although it was a small meeting, it can be foreseen that the meeting will yield bigger and more important results. One day it will lead to changes in the Chinese klenteng in

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159 Ibid., 881.

160 Ibid., 879.

161 Ibid., 880.

162 Ibid., 880.

Indonesia.”<sup>163</sup> His prediction came true in the years that followed.

#### 2.2.4. Reforming Buddhism

The meeting between the members of Klenteng Kwan Im Tong and the JBA caused a shift in the JBA's goal from reviving Buddhism in Bali and Lombok to the reformation of klenteng as places for Buddhist worship and centres of Buddhist learning in partnership with the Peranakan Chinese and other members of the Buddhist community.<sup>164</sup>

The shift also led the JBA to introduce Southern Buddhism to as wide an audience as possible by publishing magazines and lectures. The defunct *Nama Buddhaya* was collaboratively republished by the Java section of the International Buddhist Mission and the Java Buddhist Association in Bogor became the core for diffusing information and knowledge about Buddhism. The same organization then created a new journal called *De Dhamma in Nederlandsch-Indie: Officieel Orgaan van het Centraal van het Centraal Boeddhistisch Instituut Voor Java*. The magazine was in Dutch to attract a wider audience who understood Dutch. The founders of the JBA, Power and Van Dienst provided most of the periodical's contents. For example, Van Dienst wrote a lengthy article titled “Voor Mediteerenden” (For Meditators),<sup>165</sup> which discussed *vipassana* (insight) meditation techniques based on *Vipassana Dipani: A Manual of Insight* by Ledy Sayadaw, a well-known Burmese meditation teacher. Another article published in *Nama Buddhaya* was “De Boeddha en Zijne onmiddellijke leerlingen” (The Buddha and His Disciples), which was summarized in *Buddhavamsa*, a highly regarded work in the Southern Buddhist canon that chronicled the life of Buddha Gautama and the twenty-four Buddhas who appeared before him.

It seems that Van Dienst was attempting to bridge Northern (Mahayana) and Southern (Theravada) Buddhism. This is suggested in his article titled “Mahayana Boeddhistie als moderne wereldbeschouwing” (Mahayana Buddhism as a Modern Worldview) in which he discusses both the northern and southern schools of Buddhism. In this work Van Dienst explains how several Buddhist concepts are understood in Mahayana and Theravada

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163 Ibid., 880.

164 Ibid., 881.

165 W.J. van Dienst, “Voor Mediteerenden”, *Nama Buddhaya*, 3 (n.d.), 80-105.

Buddhism. Further, he stated that Mahayana Buddhism deserved the attention of Western readers because its substance is not vastly different from that of Southern Buddhism (Theravada Buddhism).<sup>166</sup>

In order to advance its missionary work, the JBA appointed two assistant directors -- A. van der Velde for Buitenzorg (now Bogor) and J. W. de Witt for Batavia. Two more individuals were appointed -- a Deputy Director-General en Oepasaka Prediker for the New Zealand section and an assistant director for the New South Wales section. Such appointments indicate that JBA's missionary activities had become transnational.

The JBA was not the only organization concerned with the propagation of Buddhism. Other organizations were also engaged spreading Buddhism and there is evidence to show that the JBA maintained good relations with these other international organizations. One of them was the Theosophical Society, with which the JBA worked. The newspaper, *Het Nieuws van de Dag*, announced on 25 January 1930 that Van Dienst would deliver a lecture on "Waarom ben ik Boeddhist?" (Why Am I a Buddhist?) at the Theosophical Society lodge.<sup>167</sup> The Peranakan Chinese community (led by the JBA's Kwee Tek Hoay) and the Theosophical Society (led by Ong Soe Aan) also collaborated during the visit of the Sri Lankan monk, Bikkhu Narada, in April 1934.<sup>168</sup>

Despite the success of its activities, the JBA was short-lived. There is no detailed account of the cause(s) leading to its formal termination on 9 July 1934. Interestingly, the influence of Van Dienst remained and took another form, and the Centraal Boeddhistisch Instituut voor Java (The Central Buddhist Institute for Java) succeeded the JBA.

The Institute aimed to become an important Buddhist organization and offer help and assistance to different Buddhist groups and organizations without interfering in their internal business. The Institute wanted to work with all Buddhists in both Indonesia and other countries. Below were the objectives of the Institute:

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166 W.J. van Dienst, *Mahayana Boeddhisme als moderne wereldbeschouwing* (Buitenzorg: Publicatie van Het Centraal Boeddhistisch Instituut der Soenda Eilanden, 1935), 3.

167 This lecture was also delivered together with E.E. Power. *Het Nieuws van de Dag* (25 January 1930).

168 Kwee Tek Hoay, "Kedatenggannja Bikkhu Narada Thera", *Moestika Dharma; Maandblad Tentang Agama, Kabatinan dan Filosofie*, 25 (April 1934), 922.

- To educate the *Oepasaka* or priests to serve various Buddhist groups, organizations and associations in the kingdom of Nederland;
- To establish Buddhist organizations and study clubs;
- To give assistance to other Buddhist associations and organizations who are ready to work together;
- To establish non-sectarian elementary Buddhist schools;
- To establish a Buddhist University in Java;
- To establish Buddhist branches, temples and *vihara* (Buddhist praying house) as well as to maintain and serve Buddhist monks and priests therein;
- To encourage the establishment of libraries; the organization of classes and temple services; and the publication of books, periodicals and other types of print materials by legal and non-political means;
- To obtain the legal recognition of the Buddhist religion in the Netherlands Indies, as well as of Buddhist monks and Oepasaka preachers, so that these will also be included with those to whom that which is determined by article 70 of the Draft Regulation (staatsblad 1924, no. 24) applies;
- To organize an annual Buddhist congress in the Netherlands Indie; and To work on the translation of the Pali Buddhist canon (Tipitaka).<sup>169</sup>

Aside from aforementioned goals, the Central Buddhist Institute for Java listed the following Buddhist organizations associated with it:

- The International Buddhist Mission, Thaton, Burma;
- The World Buddhist Council;
- The Universal Union for the Diffusion of Buddhist Philosophy, New York;
- The Permanent Congress of Buddhist Leaders and Philosophers;
- The Buddha Society, Mumbai;
- The Buddhist World, Bangalore;
- The International Buddhist Union, Singapore;
- The Buddhist Lodge, London;
- The British Maha-Bodhi Society, Calcutta;
- The Maha-Bodhi Society of Ceylon, Colombo;
- The International Institute of Hawaii, Honolulu;
- Das Buddhistische Haus, Berlin-Frohnou; and

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<sup>169</sup> Van Dienst, “*Namo tassa bhagavato*”, 2.

- Neo-Buddhistischer Verlag, Berlin-Frohnou en verschilende andere binnen en buitenlandsche Boeddhistiesche lichamen.<sup>170</sup>

The Institute also published *De Dhamma in Nederlandsch-Indië*, a four-page bulletin in Dutch in August and September 1934.

### 2.3. BHIKKHU NARADA: THE FIRST YELLOW-ROBE FROM THE SOUTH

The Sri Lankan monk Bhikkhu Narada visited colonial Indonesia for *Dhammic* work (missionary work that involved the teaching of Buddhism by Buddhist monks). Called Sumanapala before he became a monk, Narada was born on 14 July 1898 in Kotahena, Sri Lanka.<sup>171</sup> Before entering monkhood, the young Narada was educated at St. Benedict's College, Kotahena, which exposed him to Christian rituals and the discourse of Christianity. In this respect, Narada did not entirely grow up in a Buddhist environment. His first encounter with Buddhism happened only when he was eighteen years old, when he met the most Venerable Pelene Vajiragnana Maha Nayaka Thera. The young Narada was soon ordained as a Buddhist novice and received full ordination as a Buddhist monk two years later at the Vajiraramaya monastery.<sup>172</sup>

Narada was described as a promising young monk. His debut in the international world took place when he was thirty-one years old. He went to Sarnath, India to participate in the opening ceremony of the Mulagandakuti Vihara erected by Anagarika Dharmapala. Because of his excellence and eloquence he was appointed to lead all the proceedings at the historic event. Olcott Gunasekera, the founding president of the Dharmavijaya Foundation, recorded that following Narada's visit to India, he started his missionary work in other Asian regions such as Indonesia, Singapore, Nepal and Vietnam.<sup>173</sup>

In modern Indonesia, Narada is often regarded as the first Buddhist monk who visited Indonesia after the end of the Hindu-Buddhist era in the sixteenth century. However, this claim is only partially true. In the previous section, it was pointed out that the meetings between the JBA and the

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170 Ibid., 2.

171 <http://www.budsas.org/ebud/ebdha296.htm>. (Accessed 6 May 2016).

172 Ibid.

173 Ibid.

Peranakan Chinese showed that there were Buddhist monks of Mahayana/Northern tradition residing in Java. It is more accurate to say that Narada was the first monk from the Southern (Theravada) Buddhist tradition to visit Java after the Hindu-Buddhist era.

Narada first visited Java in 1934. The account of his first sojourn in Indonesia demonstrates the expanding chain of Buddhist networks and linkages in two ways. First, Singaporean Buddhists funded Narada's journey to Java; such financial support was crucial to the success of this journey. Or, as Kwee Tek Hoay put it, outside funding was essential because Buddhist community in Java could not afford to supply such aid.<sup>174</sup> Second, Narada's repeated visits to Java further developed transnational Buddhist networks in the 1930s. As Buddhist organizations led by Europeans (the JBA and the Theosophical Society) closed down, Narada continued to guide and mentor Indonesian Buddhists into the 1950s. Under his guidance, Southern Buddhism developed new networks, rituals and symbols that strengthened the spread of Buddhism during the late colonial period and pass independence. As Buddhist organizations led by Europeans (the JBA and the Theosophical Society) closed down, Narada continued to guide and mentor Indonesian Buddhists into the 1950s. Under his guidance, Southern Buddhism developed new networks, rituals and symbols that strengthened the spread of Buddhism during the late colonial period and pass independence.

Chapter Six will present a more detailed look at Narada's inter-Asian Buddhist connections gave a new direction Indonesian Buddhism.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has addressed the question of how and by which means Buddhism was introduced to twentieth-century colonial Indonesia. Despite its status of being unrecognized religion in the formal statistic, Buddhism lived within the society. Sources in the form of Buddhist religious publications and newspapers accounts show how various Buddhist organizations and individuals, both within and outside of Indonesia.

There are three majors connections or players that worked together at

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174 Kwee Tek Hoay, "Bebrapa keterangan tentang Bikku Narada Thera", *Moestika Dharma; Maandblad Tentang Agama, Kabatinan dan Filosofie* 24 (April 1934), 828-31; Van Dienst, "Buddhist working in Java", 79.

the same time, namely the Theosophical Society, the European individuals represented in the Java Buddhist Association, and the Asian connection, represented by Bhikkhu Narada from Sri Lanka. The three players introduced the Southern school of Buddhism to Indonesia through missionary work and print publications in the early twentieth century. This event marked a new beginning of the presence of Buddhism in colonial Indonesia. This chapter also provides vivid foundation towards further development of Buddhism when they paired themselves with the Northern Buddhism group, the Peranakan Chinese.

The emergence of Buddhism in Indonesia was accelerated by transnational networks that were, in turn, a part of a wider movement of ideas that circulated around, through and beyond the borders of British and Dutch colonial empires in South and Southeast Asia. The next chapter focuses on Theravada Buddhism missionary activities as they came face to face with the Northern Buddhist school.

